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NEW POEMS



NEW POEMS

BY

ST. JOHN LUCAS



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ST. J. L.

LONDON,
February, 1908.

Nul n'a vu rayonner deux fois la même flamme,
Ni renaître l'amour à sa jeunesse offert,
Et plus d'une âme en pleurs s'est vainement cherchée
Dans l'hostile rumeur de la vie où se perd
Le murmure incertain de la source cachée.

CHARLES GUÉRIN.

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*TO write no word that has not thrilled
My heart; to serve nor gold nor fame;
To do no languid act unwilling
By Nature, nor make terms with shame;*

*To scorn rewards that fools count dear;
To love my art, to keep my friend;
To help the weak, to live sincere;—
Ah me, what broken vows to mend!*

BALLAD OF THE RIDGEWAY

FROM the blinking surf where the Lizard
 sprawls,
To the iron fangs of the North,
There is many a road to stir the blood
Of him who fareth forth.
All roads seem good to the wise of mood,
But of all the roads that be,
My chosen way is the broad Ridgeway
That is home and friend to me.

Now fine and broad is your new-made road,
And there my spirit sings;
But the Roman wrought, as a Roman ought,
A street for the cars of kings.
He hurled his chain across the plain
Sheer forthright to its bent,
Like a fetter forged on the giant flank
Of a captive continent.

BALLAD OF THE RIDGEWAY

He passed, his legionaries tread
A dimmer, greyer plain
Than Ashdown field, where shield to shield
Clashed Wessex man and Dane;
But folk who travel Lambourn way
At eve from Wantage town
Still hear a Latin watchword ring
Across the drowsy down.

And sentinels with falcon face
Beneath a ghostly moon
Clank starkly round the thymy mound
Where shepherds lolled at noon;
The gates divide, and like a tide
The phantom legion swings,
With tarnished eagles, down the slope
To tame the Briton kings.

But I am a man of the common kind;
I see no fiercer sight
Than the old hawthorn at sentry-go,
And the glow-worm's cresset light;
The gentle breath of the sleeping earth
Drifts from the land below,

BALLAD OF THE RIDGEWAY

And the big and little stars of God
They watch me as I go.

Let the valley lanes seem good to those
Who love a guarded way;
The place of my soul is the wind-scoured down
Where the red sun burns all day.
And O the road, the gallant road!
Let me follow and track my friend,
The great green snake of turf that glides
With never a coil nor bend.

Fetid and foul are the city streets;
O let me once more feel
The ample wind in my shoulder-parts
And the leaping turf at my heel!
O let me leave the tunnelled ways
And the ant-heap towns of toil,
To breast the brow of Wantage Hill,
And smell the ancient soil!

Now some love women, and these are wise;
And some love ale and wine;
And the poet's art is life to the heart,

BALLAD OF THE RIDGEWAY

But a road is a thing divine.
Go East, go West, there are roads of the best;
But of all the roads that be,
O the royal way, the broad Ridgeway,
Is king of roads for me!

LOVE IN ABSENCE

ONLY to be with you all the shining day,
Now that April sinks to sleep on the heart
of May;
Only just to hear the thousand things you used to
say!

Trifles, were they? Then I laughed? Now at least
they hover
O'er my happy dreams of you like bees that haunt
the clover;
Time is such a wizard,—or I am such a lover!

CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE

I

THE barges with their umber sails,
The couchant Sphinx on either hand,
The bridge, the dusty light that fails,
The sullen thunder of the Strand,—

How often as I roamed beside
The soft, unfurrowed, inland sea
That clasps brown Italy for bride,
The din, the scene came back to me!

But most in Rome, where, strangely wrought
With some dead God's fantastic sign,
The pillars by Augustus brought,
And Claudius and Constantine,

Eternal granite, tower sublime
Above the puny pomps of kings,
And mark the wizened claw of time
Sift the thin sand of mortal things.

CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE

For whether from the Latin way
I watched the august, enshadowed dome
Flash sudden homage to the day,
Till all my blood sang praise to Rome;

Or from the purple Alban crest,
A little ere the fall of night,
The spireless, undulating breast
Of her from whom a world drew light;—

A moment, and the land was lost;
The city wavered, mist-involved;
Each hill was a dissembling ghost,
Each dome a bubble that dissolved.

Again I saw the bridge above;
The oily, russet stream beneath;
And the cold emblem that I love,
The mute, immortal monolith.

II

O captive from the silent East,
Disdainful witness! who dost mark
Our draught of breath, our moment's feast,
Our little respite from the dark;

CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE

Our voice to you the hiss of hate,
The lover's word, the dying moan ;
Death strangles each or soon or late ;
You watch and watch, sardonic stone.

Sick flies, across the waste of Time
We crawl our yard, and buzz, and die ;
Poor motes of dust that scarce begrime
The pale plains of Eternity.

The last sun staggers down the dusk,
The last wind moans around our walls,
And on a planet's seedless husk
The white, tremendous silence falls.

III

Is this your sad, prophetic dream?
Or does the rumour of the tide
Recall another, holier stream ;
And where the ebon barges glide,

Sharp-edged by sunset, do you see
The swarthy galleys of dead queens
Drift with their mournful symphony
Of sullen drums and tambourines?

CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE

What melody of mingled flutes,
From Thebes or Karnak thinly blown,
Perturbs your peace? What Memphian lutes
Wake sense in your insensate stone?

Ah! vain to you our shifts and turns;
Our acts of evil, dreams of good,
Within whose granite heart still burns
Old Egypt's fierce luxurious blood!

Your soul is Egypt's soul, and she
Looks out from you across the tide;
And dynasty by dynasty
Her demi-gods and heroes glide,

Like wraiths from a sepulchral frieze,
Across the scarlet arch of sky;
Memnon and mighty Rhameses,
Psammetichus and Ptolemy.

Beyond desire and love and hate
Their delicate, curved lips are wise;
Not Death himself may desecrate
Their calm, inexorable eyes.

CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE

IV

They fade and pass, these Kings of Kings,
To dream within an icy court,
And tumults of ambiguous things,
Abortions of the womb of thought,

Follow the pageant. From the stars
Lamenting Isis leans to kiss
The lotus-leaves, the nenuphars
Of haughty Heliopolis;

Bull-gods and hawk-face deities
Pass by in obscene ritual;
These were her work, her children these!
Osiris, Ammon, Apis,—all

Begotten by the imperial Nile
Of her majestic womb, and set
In some stupendous peristyle
For all the world to worship. Yet

The sickle of oblivion reaps
The harvest of their might and lust.
She looks upon our world, and weeps;
For these were Gods, and these are dust.

CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE

V

O pilgrim from the thirsty plain
That drinks the lotus-languid streams,
Not yours, but mine, this hectic strain;
All mine, all mine, these mournful dreams!

Forgive the heart which half believed
That deep within your cruel stone,
From age to age, there drooped and grieved
A spirit lonely as his own.

Your sight is single; but my soul,
Beneath contending planets born,
Aspires to Heaven, then finds her goal
In all that Heaven holds in scorn.

Not wholly dead to higher things,
Nor all aloof from earthy stain,
Like Icarus, she spreads weak wings,
And strives to soar, and strives in vain.

No more her god-like dreams appear,
In youth's amazing vesture clothed;
The tragedy of life is here;—
She loves the things that once she loathed.

CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE

And shakes her bonds, yet dare not flee,
Poor minion of each changeful mood,
To dwell alone with liberty
In thought's unsullied solitude.

O may she learn, like you, to rise
Serene o'er life's distracting streams;
And follow with devoted eyes
Her old ideal, her star that gleams

Effulgent as a God unveiled,
Whose radiant apparition shames
All ungirt loins that cringed and failed,
All pigmy hates and sickly aims.



LAZARUS

“**L**OOSE him, and let him go.” And it was
done.

The heavy cere-cloths fell; the living dead
Stepped from the dreadful precinct of the grave,
Dazzled, to re-behold a blinding world.

And first his sister touched him, while her tears
Fell on his faltering hands; but Lazarus
Gazed with vague eyes upon her, as madmen stare
On women whom they loved ere reason died,
And turned to Him Whose cry had rent the tomb,
Thrilling to his cold ear,—to Him, Who stood
Silent amid those voices, with sad lips.
And Lazarus spake at last, his livid face
Wrung with a terrible anguish, and his eyes
Reproachful to that Presence, once so near

LAZARUS

And brotherly familiar; now so strange
In this authority of life; and said:
"Wherefore?" and paused. But He, to Whom the
heart

Foredone with Death's immedicable wound
Was like a dreamer wakened in the dawn
By touch or whisper, looked on Lazarus,
And spake no word.

It was about the hour
Of mid-day when that miracle was wrought.
The white road shimmered in the glaring sun;
The dusty palms drooped languidly; the ox
Lay panting near his load of great brown jars
Beside the well-head. All the burning air
Thrilled with the hum of insects, and the rasp
Of loud cicalas. Slow along the road
The dead man went, past feathery tamarisks,
And trellises of broad-leaved figs; and gained
The low, white gate of little Bethany;
And the crowd followed, whispering; but He,
The Author of this marvel, stood alone
Beside the hollow sepulchre, that gaped
Greedy toward Him like a famished beast.

LAZARUS

And they gave meat and drink to Lazarus,
And watched him, scarcely breathing; and he ate,
Staring before him ever with blank eyes,
And speaking nought. And when they saw this
thing,

They laughed and wept like men bewitched, and
sang

Praises to God Who gave them back their friend.
But Lazarus praised Him not. Then one of them
Cried: "It were meet to bring the children hither
To see this man,—a memory for their lives,
A tale to teach the sons of their own sons."

The word went forth, and lo! the street was
thronged

With tiny creatures, naked and brown-limbed;
Garrulous, with vivid eyes; eager to gaze.
But when the children looked on Lazarus,
They shuddered and wrung tiny hands, and wailed,
And sought to flee, since their clear glance perceived
The shadow of the knowledge in those eyes.
And Lazarus looked on them, and turned, and wept.

Pale, like a murdered god, the fierce day died;
The dusk fell sudden as a healing thought,

LAZARUS

And sleep consoled the earth. But he slept not,
Who for three nights had dreamed, but climbed
the stair,
And stood upon the glimmering roof, and gazed
Across the hollow pastures of the dark,
Thick with a myriad star-flowers. All night long
He stood; but when the grey-green wings of dawn,
Free from their sombre chrysalis, appeared
Humid and tremulous in the watery East,
He left the place, and faring with slow steps
Along the silent street where night yet lurked,
He passed the gatehouse with its drowsy guard,
And gained the dim fields and the misty plain.
Then, gazing where the golden minarets
Burned on Moriah, beyond the ill-omened hills
That flank the Tombs of Prophets, he beheld
Jerusalem, most lovely in the dawn,
Rose-flushed, a heavenly handmaid; and his lips
Were bitter with fore-knowledge, and he groaned;
And turning, journeyed to the tettered coast
Of the Asphaltite Lake; tracking the course
Of Kedron's narrow flood, that intersects
The ribbed Judæan desert; so at length
He trod the brittle borders of that sea,

LAZARUS

Dead like his soul. The high sun cast in vain
His bounty on the solitary shore;
No tree leant down its gossip-laden leaves
To those pale, listless waters; no bird piped
A challenge to that gaunt and mute despair.
Yet was the place not lifeless, for to him
Who crouched there like a carven thing, his head
Drooped low between his knees, there came the
 sound
Of feet that split the thin bituminous flakes,
And voices that drew nigh; and looking up,
He saw two children come, a boy and girl,
Who watched him with great eyes, and when he
 stared
Fiercely upon them, flinched not. Then he rose,
And held out hands, to them, knowing not why,
And cried: "O little ghosts that haunt this place,
Give comfort to your brother, snatched from death
To stare upon the intolerable sun!
Give comfort to the wretched soul who passed
The Portal, and beheld what ye beheld,—
For your eyes tell me this,—and thence was lured
Back to the world, omniscient, with sealed lips."
But when their mortal hands touched his, he gazed

LAZARUS

Aghast upon them, crying: "Ye too live,
Wearing the pain of knowledge in your eyes!
What mean ye? Wherefore fled ye not?"

The boy

Answered: "We too have passed the dreadful gate;
We too returned with knowledge like to thine;
This is that child of Jairus, who was dead,
And I, the widow's son who dwelt at Nain."

Then by the fruitless margin of that sea,
They fared with silent lips, and in their eyes
The anguish of unutterable thought.

FEAR

WHEN the summer twilight closes
O'er the river, round the roses;
When the panes that glowed
Darken, each a burnt-out ember,
This our sinking hearts remember,
And forbode:

Some wild autumn sunset burning
O'er a wanderer returning
Eager-eyed,—to find
Only faded roses, only
Vacant windows, and the lonely
Moaning wind.

THE ARTIST

THE long white room
Even in summer chilled the heart.
There came nor sweet-throat song of birds
Nor rumour of the brave winds of the world
To vex that passionless calm.
Life, like a lyric river,
Swept past our stagnant inlet, with no gift
Of water warm with sun. And he,
The Master, spent and grey,
Impotent thrall of antique rules,
Formal and frigid as his ghostly house,
Sat, like a king embalmed,
Aloof in his high chair, and held his state,
With austere eyes, and speech that fell
Athwart the rebel fervour of our youth
Like snow on flame.

So, ere my soul was dead
Beyond all hope of change, I rose

THE ARTIST

From the mute throng of students, and went forth
Beneath his angry laughter. At the gate
Halting, I saw their startled eyes,
Deep-shadowed by the waves of boyish hair,
Turn back towards an empty task, and him,
The warden of their tomb, that white, old Death
Who prophesied my woe.

Cold, cold, those barren halls !
But soon I saw the imperial sun who hung
Lover-like o'er his eager bride the earth,
And heard the giant laughter of wild waves
That kissed the radiant feet of Spring.
Then my heart thrilled responsive, and I knew
It was no casual whim that led me forth
From that pale precinct and its lifeless air,
But the inevitable voice
Of supreme liberty.

Therefore I journeyed to the virgin woods,
Where the shy soul of Nature seems more near
Than by the noisy sea
Or on the resonant hills and naked plain,
All day I roamed in murmurous avenues

THE ARTIST

Dappled with errant sunlight, or obscure
With holy shade of immemorial trees;—
Dark oaks, where ivy climbed
Like veins upon a lean man's arm.

And, as I went,
Always I heard soft voices in the leaves;
Vivid eyes peered out;
Quiet footsteps followed me;
Sudden throngs of elfin shapes
Fled with laughter from my path.

Deeper, deeper I plunged
Into that warm sea of leaf,
Until every glade became
Populous with gentle ghosts.
So in the forest's inmost sanctuary
I stood at length, and listened.

The tall trees seemed asleep in that great heat,
And all their leaves
Hung limp as nerveless hands; but, far below,
The huddled hornbeams of the underwood
Were tremulous with magic wind;
The dense wych-hazels murmured;
And o'er the plummy bracken-fronds, still starred

THE ARTIST

With day-spring's happy tears,
The drowsy breath of earth arose
Like films of hueless flame.
The air was tense with murmurs and sharp sound;
Twigs rustled, dead wood snapped;
Birds thrilled a myriad-throated symphony,
Bees hummed a bourdon,
Fir-cones cracked in the sun;
And as my sense grew quick in that strange grove
I marked with eyes amazed
A thousand swift nativities of flowers,
And heard the rustle of unfolding buds.

Then, while I stood entranced
In that deep heaven of colour and song,
Like some undaunted sailor, who, at last,
After unutterable toil,
Blind nights of tempest, glaring days,
Hunger and thirst, and the long misery
Of those eternal grey and shoreless leagues,
Wakes, steadfast still, and sees
Dawn build her roseate arch
Above the Happy Lands, and knows
This thing has come because his soul

THE ARTIST

Looked back and faltered never; even thus

I knew my haven found;

Knew that all life was vassal to my art;

Heard the reiterant pulses of the world

Beat in these holy solitudes, more loud

' Than all the roar of cities, and beheld

All thoughts and deeds that were and are to be

Clear in the form and colour of those woods.

So I unrolled my canvas, and all day

Bent over it, and as I worked,—

Not raising eyes, but listening,

And feeling light about me like a robe,—

My soul grew keener every hour; I knew

The shapes of all the thousand things that moved

On noiseless feet anigh me; nymphs and fauns,

Naiads and hamadryads, wanton satyrs

And pigmy elves that live in undergrowth,

Fairies as small as moths, and gnomes

Who creep by day within the womb of earth;

All these I painted; whether hurrying past

On some grave errand bent,

Or dancing round me as I toiled

In swift inquisitive multitudes,—I divined

THE ARTIST

Their secret liberties, nor looked on them
Save with my soul's new-wakened eyes.

Sometimes I heard the sound
Of mighty hoofs that scattered moss and leaves,
And smelt the acrid steam that rose
From the wet flanks of centaurs galloping.

Sometimes a joyous pair
Of fleece-clad shepherds with their knotty crooks
Lolled nigh me in the noonday heat, and strove
Alternating in song, or carved
Old legends on a new-turned beechen bowl,
Or coaxed thin music from their rival reeds.

Sometimes a throng of nymphs,
Broad-flanked, deep-bosomed, white as milk,
Glad in their tameless beauty, stood
Curved in a glowing line above the stream;
Then plunged with arrowy swiftness and shrill cries,
Seeing the branches stir
Beneath brown fingers of an amorous god.

Sometimes the satyrs came
And crouched beside me, muttering,
Touching my hair; or leaned
Their slanting eyes and shaggy-tufted ears

THE ARTIST

Over my shoulder as I toiled;
Then, with a sudden stamp of horny feet
Spurning the earth, they fled
With laughter like a jay's.

All these I wrought
Into my glowing canvas. Every hour
Yielded new gift of insight, till my soul
Seemed like a god who dwells
In austere palaces of cloud, and thence
Beholds the seething world with tranquil eyes.

Marvel on marvel filled
That magic picture; not the woods alone
With their inexorable dynasties
And solemn ritual of unseen lives
Were mirrored there, but all
The colour of all earth, and the strange light
That haunts the virgin heart of the old sea.

The shiftings of the fickle tide
That is the will of man;
His passion and his madness,—these I showed
In symbols of deep hue and subtle line;
I learnt the lovely secrets of the stars,
The reckless rapture of the wind,

THE ARTIST

The joy that is the sun's.
These I translated all; one power alone
Eluded me; one vision was withheld.
I saw Him not, whose voice was in the wind,
Whose eye burned through the sunset and the dawn;
 He, he escaped me ever,
 The Master of these haunted groves,
 The King of teeming life,
 The God.

Sometimes my blood would tell me he was near,
And then dim apparitions of his form
 Would throng my heated brain.
And once at daybreak, as I bent
Over my work, completed but for him,
I felt his presence imminent, and let fall
 My brush and colours, and forgot
The hard restraint long set upon mine eyes,
And looked up from the canvas. But I saw
 Nothing save those dim glades
Of bracken waving minatory arms,
And dark, reproachful branches of the trees.

Wherefore my soul grew sick, and all the rhythm

THE ARTIST

Of that high task was ruined; like a day
Which should have brought some friend
Joyous and long-awaited; but its hours
Creep on to dusk, and no glad voice consoles
The watcher's heavy heart.

And as he, the lonely one,
Stares at the door until he well-nigh sees,
There on the threshold, that expected form,
And hears the phantom of his voice; so I,
Eager and always baffled, conjured up
Visions of that mysterious, absent face,
And set them in the picture. Yet I knew
That they were mocking dreams.

Then, at the last,
When I was well-nigh wearied out of hope
By such deceitful visions, and my toil
Became a nightmare thing that strangled sleep,
Suddenly, before dawn
Hushed the long moaning of the feverish sea,
And pallid, emissary wands of light
Waved in the woodland, I beheld
No semblance, but the terror at my heart
Told me it was the God himself.

THE ARTIST

Beside the splendour of my toil
He stood, no goat-foot thing,
But awful and austere, with eyes
That burnt my soul.
Older than any world he was, and vast;
But all about his face
The dreadful youth of immortality
Blazed like the fire of suns unknown.
Awhile he glared in silence, then he turned
And pointed to my parody, and spake.
So far shalt thou attain; no step beyond.
O fool, who deemest thine
The knowledge of things ultimate, beware.
Crawl in thy dust, O worm.

And as the great voice boomed,
I felt the trembling of my naked soul.

But when the wizard sun
Made heaven of all the world, I rose
Laughing in pride, and bent above my task,
And drew him as he was, that mighty God.
All day I wrought on him,

THE ARTIST

Nor heeded, as I toiled ecstatically,
The light that waned in sinister eclipse,
The woods grown grey with angry wind,
 The warning note of birds.
Loud, loud the stricken ocean wailed ;
The giant oaks and high sonorous pines
 In strange convulsion racked,
Groaned like sad prophets of calamity,
 And tossed their tortured arms.
I marked them not, who had a god for slave,
 But wrought and wrought.
The frenzied bands of satyrs fled the woods ;
The centaurs galloped mad with fear, and fell
 Crashing in blind ravines ; the nymphs
Flew like pale ghosts with streaming hair
 And anguished lips and eyes.
I marked them not ; but when the dim day closed
Ominous with stamping thunder and loud rain,
I thrust my face against the storm, and laughed.

Even in that exultant hour
His madness burnt red-hot within my brain ;
And whilst the hurricane razed the haughty woods,
 And wild beasts snarled with fear,

THE ARTIST

I tore the fruit of my long toil,
That picture where my soul had made a world,
That heaven of colour and line;
Savagely, savagely, to tiny shreds,
Stained like the flesh of Orpheus, when he fell
Amongst the Thracian women, and Hebrus ran
Red with his sacred blood.
So the God triumphed, and the tempest lulled,
And in that silence came no sound
But weeping of rent groves and ravished glades.

Nay, did he triumph, though my life becomes
Like whirling straw in waters that obey
Some haggard sequence of disastrous moons?
Did I not shake his pride
In that tremendous issue when we strove,
He with his strength, I with my supreme art,
And has he slain my soul?
Unconquerable soul! a little while,
A little while for breath, and then
Once more my challenge rings across the world!
Once more I dare the rage
Of him whom I shall tame and make my friend.
Let him bring all his science and deep spells,

THE ARTIST

And snares and cunning subterfuge,
For he perchance shall find
Me warier, and himself
Still wan from that great conflict with his peer.

NIGHT AND DAY

WHEN the grey night comes drifting o'er the
sea,

The melancholy sea that will not sleep,
And the moist wind is sad with ghosts of flowers,
Dear, do you think of me?

Alas! . . . But when the birds wake, and anew
Dawn weaves her coronal of rosy hours,
Pale from the vigil that remorse must keep,
I think and think of you.

I am the image of night, expressionless;
Haunted by mocking ghosts and hateful dreams;
Heavy with anguish of distracted thought;

But you,—O you are like the dawn that gleams
On men who wander in a wilderness;
Guiding their wounded feet to holy streams,
And gilding the fair city that they sought.

FUNERAL MARCH OF A MAD POET

THE slow, fine rain blurs the deserted road,
The wind moans ghost-like in the tearful
trees;

O brother mourners, take we up our load,

And let all outcasts join our obsequies,—
Waifs, dreamers, fools,—that sleek men peering
down

May thank their God they are not such as these.

Welcome all pariahs! Harlots of the town,
Mummers and lunatics, fall in, fall in!
Wastrels and wine-besotted wrecks who drown

Slowly in stagnant backwaters of sin,
Welcome, who ne'er won welcome! Form the line,
And let the tragic ritual begin.

FUNERAL MARCH OF A MAD POET

How the wind moans! The swollen rain-drops
shine

Upon the naked coffin. Not the less
Bare we him greatly up the hard incline ;

For though amid the city's fume and stress
Like blood on thirsty sand his life was lost,
He shall have burial in the wilderness.

Forward ! Aloof from that insensate host
Who prate of freedom through their prison-bars;
Formal, discreet, and damned the nethermost

Of all in their pale hell where nothing jars;
Who watched the inch of earth before their feet,
Whilst this man hailed the sun and all the stars.

Forward! the great wind roars; the swirling sleet
Drives in each upturned face; but mid the showers
There comes a thrill of something strange and
sweet,

Like antique music heard in twilit hours
By men forespent with labour; or the breath
Of moon-white gardens deep in old-world flowers.

FUNERAL MARCH OF A MAD POET

Forward! It is no icy-fingered Death
That hangs our burden with a misty pall,
But She, the faithful Mother of all beneath,

Who, from her palace-height aerial,
Casts forth her robe to hide her child, and weeps
Welcome to her poor homing prodigal.

* * * * *

O Mother, we have left the dens and deeps
To stand at last upon the wind-pure plain,
Where, broad and beautiful, the highway sweeps

Like a great hope towards thy starry fane.
Receive thy son; not only him receive,
But all sad waifs who turn to thee again.

These painted ghosts, these failures who believe
Only in their accurséd star; these knaves
Foredoomed in Fate's tribunal past reprieve;

Sucked down and slain by all disastrous waves;
These living deaths, these senseless palimpsests,—
Even to them extend the hand that saves.

FUNERAL MARCH OF A MAD POET

Pity them! For as birds from out their nests
Cast the diseased and ailing, so the world
Has fixed her falcon talons in their breasts,

Saying: "In this deep slime where ye are hurled
Abide; and lest your presence mar my song,
Crouch silently with pinions always furled."

Not thus he covered whom we bear, but strong
And clarion-clear his voice in lyric days.
Yet ah! the poet's path is lonely-long,

And he was mad for life's warm, treacherous ways,
Her heady ardours of voluptuous hours;
And as a foolish mountain-bee that strays

Far from its home in dusky heather bowers,
Falls dead at last, poor pirate overbold,
In some dank garden set with poisonous flowers;

So he, in his high loneliness a-cold,
Wandered in weary mists, imagining
Rare dreams in eyes that only dreamed of gold.

FUNERAL MARCH OF A MAD POET

Therefore his name became a curséd thing
Spat out by prurient mouths, a nightmare cry
On meagre lips of hate; and he, the king

Of life, lone eagle of our obscure sky,
Bled in the world's small snares that bite and rend,
And learnt the ruth of them who crucify.

Therefore, when he was ambushed, lover and friend
Fled from the fatal circle of his doom,
And held themselves aloof to see the end.

* * * * *

Not yet, not yet the end! On thy dread loom
Gather the wasted threads of his rent soul,
O Mother, patient Mother, from whose womb

Is nought e'er born unwinged to seek some goal
More starry than the dwindling lights of earth!
Take thou this broken heart and make it whole.

Nay, what to thee man's word of death or birth,
To whom our narrow life is but a school
Wherein thou placest souls to mete their worth?

FUNERAL MARCH OF A MAD POET

And though this scholar scorned each iron rule,
And flared in folly's robe, and mocked our creed,
Are our tests thine, O wise and merciful?

For if our sense might pierce the dusk indeed,
Haply some voice oracular should say:
"Love ye, and weep; this much have I decreed;

"And he who dwelt in this void house of clay
Loved greatly, greatly suffered, and so learns
His lesson, and toils onward to the day."

Behold! at length the eternal sun-god burns
Red through the ruined clouds, and all the West
Glows like a heart where long-lost hope returns.
Take we the omen. . . . Leave we him at rest.

WINDOWS

HERE in the city each window is blank as a
dead man's eye ;

But the windows of a village in the land where I
would be

Shine out to me like the faces of friends when
night storms up the sky,

Scanning the hills for their tardy guest, waiting,
looking for me.

Like the smoke of an empire burning the night
drifts over the deep,

And the shadows are dusky giants who stride o'er
the mountain-range ;

And the silent earth is clothed with the marvellous
hues of sleep ;

And the dark flowers melt in darkness, and the
white flowers waver and change.

O it is there I would be at this hour, far from the
voluble street,

WINDOWS

And the cunning of little men, and the gossip of
 little towns;
Above my head my comrades the stars, and beneath
 my feet,
The warm bosom of earth, the naked breast of the
 downs.

For I know that where the lines of the hill curve
 splendidly to the sea,
In the house with the grey stone gable beyond
 where the pathway ends,
Night after night, in storm or calm, a woman
 watches for me
At one of those golden windows that shine like the
 eyes of friends.

And I know that when I return at last, travel-
 sullied and vile,
Scourged by the whips of life, broken and wan
 with years,
The blood will leap to my lonely heart when I see
 her smile,
And my tear-stained soul shall be cleansed in the
 healing rain of her tears.

THE STRIPLING THAMES

AS I came down from Bablock-Hythe
Through meads yet virgin of the scythe,
The air was sweet, the birds were blithe
Along the stream to Eynsham.

The guelder-bloom and flower o' May,
And marguerites and elder spray,
Made either bank a milky way
From Bablock-Hythe to Eynsham.

Fast anchored 'neath the wild-rose bowers,
Like lovely thoughts transformed to flowers,
The lilies dreamed away the hours
'Twixt Bablock-Hythe and Eynsham ;

And youthful yet, and lately bound
On his adventure, he has found
Our pilgrim Thames, his holy ground
From Bablock-Hythe to Eynsham.

THE STRIPLING THAMES

How can he know, the while he threads
His silver course through golden meads,
The angry wave to which he leads,
At last, at last, from Eynsham?

Sun and sweet air,—the harmony
Of Earth and June! It seemed to me
A dream of all that youth should be,
My waterway to Eynsham.

But ah, how brief that magic spell!
True type of youth; bright streams, farewell.
Alas! we cannot always dwell
'Twixt Bablock-Hythe and Eynsham.

YSUMBRAS

I

AT Easter, when the blackthorn petals fade,
And the soft sallow blooms are thick with
gold,

He rode amid a joyous cavalcade,
Young, eager-hearted, bold

To champion right and purge the world of ill;
Like the smooth sea at dawn his eyes were fair;
And vivid as the wind-waved daffodil
His tossing yellow hair.

With laughter and loud song, that glittering band
Fared East and South through plain or forest dim,
To wrest from Paynims in the Holy Land
The empty tomb of Him

YSUMBRAS

Who bled for their salvation. Never boys,
After long labour blithe for holiday,
Rushed to the meadows with more jocund noise
Of heart-felt mirth, than they,

These iron men, rode out to wounds and pain;
And chief of them Ysumbras, whose glad soul
Sang like the bells upon his bridle rein;
Loosed now from the control

Of his grim sire, and that sepulchral hall
Where chafed his yearning boyhood; glad and free
To follow where adventurous voices call
Like clarions from the sea.

His eagle spirit soared to hail the light;
For him the world was music; all the trees
Lured him with haunting whispers, and the night
Thrilled with strange sorceries

Of voiceless mirth and wistful unsung songs.
Spring gleamed, a wayward dryad, in the glade,
Amid her happy flowers, and sudden throngs
Of wood-nymphs fled dismayed,

YSUMBRAS

Yet laughing, from fierce shield and threatening
plume,
Knee-deep where bluebells glowed in heavenly lakes,
And bracken-fronds amid the forest gloom
Uncoiled like tiny snakes.

For him the austere mountain-solitude
Rang with heroic thunder; every name
Immortal from some giant quest ensued
Blazed in a script of flame

Athwart those savage hills; he saw the last
Grim paladins by teeming foes outworn;
And paled to hear the long, blood-freezing blast
Of Roland's mighty horn.

The world became his prize: his heart was fire
With passion of strange places. Never day
Melted in dusk too slow for his desire,
Never too rough the way

Nor hard the stony couch for him who seemed
Even to those grey war-wolves without ruth,
The radiant spirit of adventure dreamed
By poets in their youth.

YSUMBRAS

II

Thus ranged they o'er a continent. Each morn
Brought redder flowers and more luxuriant leaf,
Until far South, they saw the earliest corn
Glow golden for the sheaf,

So knew the shining midland sea was near,
Warm with soft airs from Cyprus and the coast
Of Syria rich in orange groves. A cheer
Ran wave-like through the host,

And young Ysumbras flashed his virgin sword;
Mad to behold the Orient, and to win
Wounds and great fame against the Moslem horde
That followed Saladin.

Yet on that self-same day, ere noon, they found
A thin, poor village, huddled as in fear
Nigh to an angry torrent, whence the ground
Rose perilous and sheer

Above the boiling foam; the loosened snow
Had snatched the bridge for plaything, and no more
Might any of the hapless peasants go
To till the further shore,

YSUMBRAS

Sad now with ruined crops, since none might gain
A pass for these poor folk of simple wit;
But, of the few who ventured, all were slain
Miserably, seeking it.

Here paused their restless pennons, like the leaves
In wind-swept glades of poplar all agleam;
A score of knights unbraced their ponderous greaves;
But ere they dared the stream

Ysumbras cast off shield and helm, and spurred
His milk-white stallion to the crumbling brim,
And plunged into the tawny foam, and heard,
Grown elfin-like and dim,

The loud cry of the host, and saw the row
Of tardy knights agape upon the strand;
Far the mad current whirled him in its flow;
Yet, at the last, the sand

Grew firm beneath the snorting stallion's tread;
Under the girths the wicked water poured
Swift by the shallows; so Ysumbras led
That army through the ford,

YSUMBRAS

And thereby gat much honour. Howbeit
When they had passed the river, they perceived
The villagers, the folk of little wit

Who moaned like men bereaved,

Having no means to use the late-found way,
Perilous save to horsemen; and the most
Of those who passed before that evil day

When their frail bridge was lost,

Were women and weak children. But in vain
Their call rang o'er the cruel stream to ears
Eager for Moslem death-cries and the strain
Of swords and singing spears.

Only Ysumbras turned to where they stood
Watching their new hope fade; disconsolate,
Vile in their rags, piteous, a shameful brood
Of beggars at the gate

Of their own rotting granaries. Awhile
He gazed, his sun-like joyaunce in eclipse;
And then his brow cleared instant, and a smile
Set free his pensive lips;

YSUMBRAS

And turning to his comrades, flushed and fair
Like a young god, he laughed and shook his sword,
Crying: "Who shares this honour? Who will bear
This poor folk through the ford?"

Yea, when they called him madman: "I abide
Here, as my heart commands, to do this thing;
Yet swift," he said, "at nightfall I will ride
And find you slumbering."

Then spake the captain of the host, and bade
All leave him to his folly. He beheld
The colour of that mirth-tossed army fade
Like a rich dream dispelled

By the cold, truthful dawn, and quenched a sigh;
For all the earth was sudden grey, and sound
Perished of loneliness. Then he laid by
His well-loved arms, and found

The ford, and laboured in the heavy sun,
Bearing that timid folk across the flood;
But when the last slow sands of day had run,
And all his boyish blood

YSUMBRAS

Yearned for the bivouac and its argument
Of golden song beneath the silver stars,
Because the stallion's strength was wholly spent
 He stayed; and when the bars

Of night were riven by the captive morn,
And heaven was roseate as a lover's dream,
He saw again those pale men and forlorn
 Watching beside the stream;

And thought: "Small matter were it to remain
An hour, since swifter far than that array,
Spread like a freckled snake across the plain,
 I ride; lo! even a day

"Were nothing to recover; let the noon
See my farewell!" But many a noon his arms
Rusted; and when the red, autumnal moon
 Glowed o'er the plenished farms,

He toiled there still; for when he paused, beguiled
By that dark spear and dim reproachful sword,
Ever he heard the thin voice of some child
 Calling across the ford.

YSUMBRAS

III

So passed the stealthy seasons; so the years
Fell one by one, a punctual tribute told
In the worn hand of time; the ripened ears
Tossed in a sea of gold

For a full score of harvests, till his eyes
Grew vague as twilit waters, and his thought
Slow as the slow speech of a man who dies;
And he remembered nought

Of his old comely life, but oft would ask
Anent that armour, and a knight who came,
Bending his great soul to a lowly task,
Nor knew himself the same;

But deemed in sooth that he was even as they,
These poor and witless folk who loved him well;
Only his clerkly speech remained alway,
And sometimes he would tell

Strange legends to the children, of a host
Sweeping amain o'er flood and mountain-pass;
Then pause, with dreamy eyes,—the vision lost
Like breath upon a glass.

YSUMBRAS

IV

The summoning trumpets of a new crusade
Thrilled once again through Europe; once again
The spears of many a gallant cavalcade
Shone bright as April rain.

Once more impetuous boys rode out from home
In stainless steel, and every heart was hot
To hear that fanfare ring through Christendom;
But one knight heard it not,

Whose ears were dull from the incessant roar
Of fierce and chafing water; yet it came
Even to him, when watching from the shore
The wounded sunset flame

Beyond the blood-red stream, he heard a hail
Sound from the hinder bank, and saw a band
Of halted knights superb in ruddy mail,
Who rode from his own land.

In his forgotten speech he heard them jest;
Free in the wind he saw his own plume toss;
And each man wore a cross upon his breast,
And on his shield a cross.

YSUMBRAS

They marked him not, that peasant grey and old,
But laughed and murmured while they tarried there;
And one slim lad with curls of burnished gold
Trilled a light country air,

Liesse d'amour, sung ere Ysumbras roamed
By girls who danced beneath the tranquil stars,
At riotous purple vintages, where foamed
Deep wine in earth-brown jars.

Then, as an ice-hemmed river bursts his chain,
And thunders welcome to reiterant Spring,
His memory cleft the tomb where it had lain
These long years slumbering;

And tremulous, with the wide and troubled gaze
Of one who wakes from trance, he left the ford
Ere that bright troop grew dim amid the haze,
And found his rusty sword,

And spear, and mouldering arms and tangled
plume,
Meshed in a myriad cobwebs, where they hung
High o'er his couch as o'er a slain knight's tomb;
And all that had been sung,—

YSUMBRAS

Liesse, liesse d'amour,—thrilled in his ears.
O wasted days! O joy of youth all spurned
O profitless and unavailing tears
For honour yet unearned!

O voice of Christ the Captain disobeyed!
Howbeit he took his armour down, and oiled
The rusty joints, and loosed the prisoned blade;
And thus all night he toiled,

Until the polished hauberk like a glass
Mirrored his spectral eyes and dim, grey hair,
Then, stunned by that gaunt image, he moaned, "Alas,
That I, so strong and fair,

"The prince of joy, the flower of chivalry,
Should droop to this dejection! How shall Christ
Or Christian arms have any need of me,
Who fall away, enticed

"By Satan's wile, and gave no youthful blood
For Him Who died in youth to save my soul,
But tarried spell-bound by this murky flood,
Forsooth, a fitting goal

YSUMBRAS

“Of all my dazzling dreams! Shall such as I,
Half blind and wholly witless, dare to take
A part in any quest of His, or die
Greatly for His dear sake?”

So, kneeling by his useless arms, he wept.
But even then, ere the deep East grew pale,
In that last, darkest hour when all men slept,
He heard a sudden hail

Ring out across the river, and his name
Called twice,—a sound most strange, since none of
those
Poor men was ware thereof. The summons came
A third time, and he rose

Breathless with some fierce agony of hope;
Deeming the knights returned. But all he found
Was one vile lazar crouching on the slope,
Whose tettered limbs were bound

With filthy rags,—a dreadful, cringing shape
That showed its sores and whined a canting prayer;
Then climbed the saddle like a monstrous ape,
And conjured him to bear

YSUMBRAS

Its parody of life across the flood ;
Which thing was done ; though hardly might the reins
Direct the maddened steed, and all the blood
 Froze in the good knight's veins,

When those lean arms twined round him like the
 coil

Of some obscene sea-devil ; yet at last
The horse gat foothold in the firmer soil
 Where the thin stream ran fast

In harmless eddies ; so they gained the bank.
Straightway Ysumbras felt his brain wax dim ;
For lo ! a shining army, rank on rank,
 Of saint and seraphim

Was marshalled on the shore ; a host of flame,
Dazzling in golden panoply that blazed
More lovely than the sun. All cried his name,
 And when he turned, amazed,

To look on that vile beggar, he was gone ;
Thin as the mist that veils the mountain side,
His shape dissolved, and in its stead there shone
 The face of Him Who died.

YSUMBRAS

So fared it with this knight. God send us all,
Who meekly tread a dull and lowly round,
Such light at last across our prison wall,
Such comrades as he found!

Kingdoms are rent in man's high enterprise,
And continents are sundered with the sword;
But Christ regards with unforgetful eyes
The Watcher at the Ford.

CHILDREN OF ENGLAND

CHILDREN of England, sons
Of the red soil; heritors
To the soul of her mighty moors
And brave sea-bastions;
You whose cradles rock
In the sounding wind of our home,
Seed of a brawny stock,
Thewed for the burden to come:

Children, a turbulent wind
Is loud on our coast to-day;
Voices I hear in the wind;
These are the words they say:—

“Noble your heritage grew
Down the long harvesting years,
Sons of the Bride of the sea!
But these, who hold it in fee
For you and the vast unborn;

CHILDREN OF ENGLAND

This garrulous, fluctuant crew,
Small with their shifts and fears,
Hot and cold, traitor and true,
What have they furnished of corn?
What have they wrought for you?

“Fled is the season of mirth,
The midsummer moon of delight;
Autumn lords it on earth,
And the lean wolves howl at night
Nearer your sentinel fires.
Ah! ere the winter come,
And the end of your long ease;—
Terrible winter, that brings
Vulture and wolf to the gate,
And swells the river of hate
With a thousand sudden springs,—
How stand your granaries?
Who tend your sentinel fires?
What burden bring they home,
Your predecessors, your sires?

“This is the burden they bring:
No glimmering sheaves, but a load

CHILDREN OF ENGLAND

That shall seem to you no light thing
When ye stand alone in the ring
Of steadfast, implacable foes.
Long is the furrow they sowed
Of dissension and private greed;
Chilly indifference to thought;
Vice hand in hand with the pose
Of a national chastity;
Huge exaltation of gold,
Deadness to beauty;—O, rare
The crop that they scattered! And ye,—
Ye shall reap, ye shall reap every tare
That springs from the terrible seed.
Ye shall cry aloud in your rage,
'O England our home, is there nought
That they spared us, these spendthrifts of old,
From that shining heritage?'"

Thus spake the voice in the wind.
But another voice followed, which said:

"O strong generations of dead,
Stark brood of an iron-souled race,
Shall your virtue, though these men have sinned,

CHILDREN OF ENGLAND

Shall your splendour be even as wind
That passes and leaves no trace?
Shall the breath of this land, which inspired
Her sages and warriors of old,
At the last blow feeble and cold;
And the torch of her fury, which fired
The galleons of Spain and their guile,—
O lions that ravened of old,
Sea-kings of the sea-skirted isle,—
Still watching her, shall ye behold,
Till your eyes be blinded with shame,
Its ultimate, staggering flame
Flicker out like the transient spark
Of a rush-light dropped in the dark?

“Nay! the heroic heart
In this worn, grim coast of yours
Dies not so tamely! the fires
That your valour kindled shall blaze
Again while the battle wind roars
On the bight of her wreck-ridden bays!
And you, O children;—your sires
Were indolent, slaves of the mart;
Verbose, inefficient; to them

CHILDREN OF ENGLAND

Look for no guidance, but turn
To the splendour of elder days;
To the steady jewels that blaze
In the brave land's diadem.
Not where the demagogue rants
Applauded of wittol and fool,
Not in this posturing school
Shall ye find your hierophants;
Not where a man may stare
On the lovely land of his birth,
Nor feel himself one with her earth,
Nor thrill like a lute in her air.
Turn not, O children, to these
Bondsmen of lucre and ease!
Turn to the fierce generations,
The men of a hardier age,
Who shattered the holds of the nations,
And harnessed the insolent seas;
Look to the warrior and sage,
And cherish your heritage!"

THE SHIP OF FOOLS

(1577)

WE are those fools who could not rest
In the dull earth we left behind,
But burned with passion for the West
And drank a frenzy from its wind ;
The world where small men live at ease
Fades from our unregretful eyes,
And blind across uncharted seas
We stagger on our enterprise.

Starboard and port, the lean waves leap
Like white-fanged wolves about our prow,
Where Mary with her Christ asleep
Is carved to hear the wanderer's vow.
The thirsty decks have drunk our blood,
Our hands are tettered from the oar ;
Wan ghosts upon a spectral flood
We drive towards a phantom shore.

THE SHIP OF FOOLS

And we have sailed in haunted seas
Dreadful with voices, where the mast
Gleamed blue with deathlights, and the breeze
Bore madness, and have stared aghast
To see beyond our splintered spars,
That rattled in the shrill typhoon,
A heaven all strange with tawny stars
And monstrous with an alien moon.

Lean, naked, bruised, like famished slaves,
We shiver at the sweeps; each one
A jest for all the scornful waves,
And food for laughter to the sun.
But never voice, nor deathlight flare
Nor moon shall stay us with their spell,
Whose eyes are calm as God, and stare
Confusion in the face of Hell.

The worn ship reels, but still unfurled
Our tattered ensign flouts the skies;
And doomed to watch a prudent world
Of little men grown mean and wise,
The old sea laughs for joy to find
One purple folly left to her,

THE SHIP OF FOOLS

When glimmers down the riotous wind
The flag of the adventurer!

O watchman leaning from the mast,
What of the night? The shadows flee;
The stars grow pale, the storm is past;
The blood-red sunrise stains the sea.
At length, at length, O steadfast wills,
Luck takes the tiller and foul tides turn;
Superb amid majestic hills
The domes of Eldorado burn!

HOMER

I

FIRST-BORN and first of all the god-like line
That sang of love and death and wayfaring,
Surely death seemed to thee a comely thing,
Having loved and fared, whose soul was more divine
Than all the imperial suns and stars that shine
In thy tremendous heaven. Not sorrowing
Thou sleptst, but worn with so great wandering
Beside Odysseus on the violet brine.

Thou wast content. To dreamers sleep is dear.
Nor couldst thou know, when from thy lifeless knees
The mute lyre fell, how myriads yet would throng,
While thy young earth waned old and grey, to hear,
Grand as the thunder of tumultuous seas,
The imperishable cadence of thy song.

HOMER

II

On a great headland of the Cyclades,
Where the ambrosial-fronted cliffs abide
The slow smooth surge of the Aegean tide,
He dwells with sleep; and there the anemones
Foster eternal flowers, and vocal bees
O'er asphodel for ever sanctified
From death, being born of dust that ne'er has died,
Weave all the year their little Odysseys.

The old splendour fades, the ancient virtues wane;
The gods are lost, the kings are deep entombed.
Whirled in the eddy wind of modern life
How many glories perish! These remain:
Supreme Achilles, beautiful and doomed,
Helen, and Troy, and that immortal strife.

PIERRE DE RONSARD

*Je seray soubz la terre, et fantosme sans os
Par les ombres myrteux je prendray mon repos;
Vous serez au fouyer une vieille accroupie,
Regrettant mon amour et vostre fier desdain.
Vivez, si m'en croyez, n'attendez à demain:
Cueillez dès aujourd'huy les roses de la vie.*

SONNETS POUR HÉLÈNE. LIV. II.

NO myrtles here; only the wanton vine
Writhes in the sun; yet 'neath this burnt-up
grass

Which changes hue with all the winds that pass,
He rests, the chief of primal stars that shine
In France's heaven of song. Ah! what decline
Holds now his lovelorn ghost, who saw, alas,
All beauty sink like sand within a glass,—
Women and youth, red roses and red wine?

And she, his Helen? Did she then, grown old
And grey as memory of a lost desire,

PIERRE DE RONSARD

Mutter his name at midnight, o'er the fire
Crouched with her drowsy handmaid? Evening falls;
Let us go hence; how chill the air! how cold
Seem all those passionate memorials!

THE SHIP AND THE RAFT

THE well-trimmed ship that rode the glinting
seas

Slow on an even keel; the ordered life
Daily recurrent, with this hour for toil
And that for rest; the faces never new;
The hollow thud of loosened sails; the groan
Of straining spars; the rattle of ropes; the sun
Fixed like a constant fire above the mast
Noon after noon; the grave, immutable stars:—
All these oppressed his soul like a dark dream,
And he grew sick for change.

Sometimes he thought

There was in truth no land, but the old earth
Lay deep engulfed beneath their lonely keel;
And peering in the waters he would find
The spires of sunken cities, and, far down,
The fair broad streets where men met men unkennd,
Or moved in ghostly concourse; and the noise

THE SHIP AND THE RAFT

Of blended voices reached him, faintly borne
In bubbles to the green roof of the sea.
Or in the dumb night-watches, when the clouds
Were racked with travail of a livid moon,
Red through the mist he saw the murky glare
Of some tremendous arsenal, where the clang
Of giant hammers ceased not, but men teemed,
And towering gantreys loomed on the vast wharves.
And often when the dawn came, and the waves
Glowed like the pearl whereof all divers dream,—
But never man may find, for in his den
The kraken with a thousand hoary coils
Shall keep it safe until the old sea dries,—
He watched the fabulous bastions of gold,
That whoso sees shall deem the great sun pale,
Leap flame-wise from the waters. But when day
Broke in upon his vision like a voice,
He shivered, chill with the long watch; and then
The lifeless, bleak horizon seemed once more
A narrow ring of iron that shrank and shrank,
And ate into his heart.

But when at last
He strove to count the argent-crested seas,
Or number the innumerable stars,

THE SHIP AND THE RAFT

And saw the red sun reel across the sky,
The moon come up in zigzags, the long flood
Slope steeply to the limit of the world;—
By this he knew his soul was sick or wise
Beyond all common ill; and having heard
Portentous voices hail him from a cloud,
He made a raft and launched it, and pushed off
From the calm ship and all her ordered ways.
None hindered him. His dreams were grown a curse.

Ah! in what vortex of distracted tides
Sank he at last, that madman? Yet, ere death
Was green about his eyes, he saw, men say,
All that his soul had imaged;—golden domes,
Palaces, campaniles; bastions
Hung thick with gorgeous tissues; granite quays
Bristling with masts; black strongholds; orange-
groves
'Neath amethystine mountains helmed in ice;
Galleons with ruddy sails; vast argosies,
Magnificent, sheathed in silver, ivory-decked;
Crowded with turbaned Moors,—while that slow
ship
Bore sightless folk across a barren sea.

THE SHIP AND THE RAFT

This madman is the poet; and his choice
The choice of them who leave the charted streams
To follow freedom with her siren voice,
And drift athwart the haunted gulf of dreams.
Wild the nocturnal wind, and grim the sea
To those who violate her mystery;
Yet better than safe ships that dread no gale,
The wanderer's broken raft and ragged sail.

TO . . .

I DARE not praise the face I love;
Those lips, those eyes that shine,
Demand a rapture far above
This tongue-tied muse of mine.

Your gentle heart I will not sing,
As other poets do;
I write of every alien thing,
And dream all day of you.

Yet, dearest, should you deign to look,
Years hence, at these dead flowers
In my despised, forgotten book,
Poor child of wasted hours;

And find some tiny hint of grace,
Some word beyond my art,
Say: "*This he plundered from my face,
And stole this from my heart.*"

THE LUTE

NOW that the skies are grey,
And songs we cherished,
Leafwise, are whirled away,
Flowerwise have perished;
Still, in the hollow lute
That served your fingers,
Ghostly, when all is mute,
An old tune lingers.

O'er the hushed instrument
A phantom hovers;
Passionate lips, and blent
Tresses of lovers
Move in the dusk again,
Like odours flowing
From banks of violet, slain
In some deep snowing.

TO A CHILD

O MORE to me than summer skies
The swift acceptance of your eyes;
The burning look your soul did send
That searched me through and found me friend!

Others are cold and wary; you
Have genius to discern the true.
They seek wit, wisdom,—things apart;
You only ask a faithful heart.

They may be fed with semblances;
Not you, whose candid spirit sees
In laughing lips the twist of guile,
The haggard face behind the smile.

Take the one virtue I possess,
And share it with me,—faithfulness:
The rest are gone; but, being friends,
Your own for mine shall make amends.

SONG

TOO soon, too soon, the din of life has drowned
The harmonies we chanted; like the sound
Of the great rains that fall by night and slay
All memory of the music of the day,
All blended voices of the summer noon,
Too soon, too soon.

Too late, too late, we hold our festival.
The wind has bared the woods; and though there
fall
Some lingering grace of an autumnal sky
Across our path, we heard that farewell cry,
O nightingale, soft summer's laureate:
Too late, too late.

THE LOST FRIEND

SPRING, with her sudden miracle of flowers,
And dancing lights and petulant swift showers,
Sets Youth aflame, and laughs in Sorrow's eyes.

O anguish past all tears, that he, who knew
The humblest minion of her retinue;
The faintest voice in her wild festival,
Beholds, if the poor dead see anything,
Only the gloom of days funereal;
Only a blank monotony of skies,
And scentless flowers that thrill not with the Spring.

THE SCHOLAR

MY life was planned so carefully!

All day the lore of scribe and sage
Was mine to plunder; the divine
Enchantment of the poet's line
Sang in my ears; clear-souled, I trod
The secret precincts of the God
Who grants a heavenly heritage
To spirits by the world unstained.

I never knew that I was chained;
My life was planned so carefully.

But now across the senseless page
Your face shines like a sun to me;
Your pale brow and your vivid eyes
And wilful wealth of tawny hair;
Your columned throat, whereat as yet

THE SCHOLAR

No passion hunter-fierce has set
His hounds too apt to leap and tear,
And your delightful slender hands;
This is the haunting ghost that vies
With all the wisdom that the wise
Have taught my soul! This phantom stands
And mocks the lore of scribe and sage!

If I could break the sullen bands
That mar my life, and take you now,
And kiss that white, imperial brow,
And that red, wistful mouth of yours,
And throat, and those dear slender hands,
All, all, then die! No soul that soars
Superb beyond the radiant doors
Which hide its god, should be my peer.

Too well I know this may not be;
I see you shrink away in fear
Of one so alien. Ah me,
For a life planned so carefully.

PAIN

*D*ISMAL and purposeless and grey
The world and all its woe, we say,
Poor slaves! who in hot hours of pain
Yearn for the night to come again.

Like tortured men at length set free,
We stagger from our misery,
And watch with foolish, pain-dimmed eyes
Vague lands and unremembered skies.

When lo! what sudden splendour spreads
Its heaven of rose above our heads!
What soft winds visit our despair;
What lights, what voices everywhere!

Ere sorrow taught us, knew we these
Stupendous hills, amazing seas?
Shone there such moonlight on the lawn;
So deep a secret in the dawn?

PAIN

What wandering hue from Paradise
Has found a home in children's eyes?
What women these, whose faces bless
Life with such tranquil tenderness?

When earth and sky and man seem fair,
Be this my watchword, this my prayer:
*Grant me, O Gods, to prize aright
Sorrow, since sorrow gives me sight.*

MY DOG

THE curate thinks you have no soul;
I know that he has none. But you,
Dear friend! whose solemn self-control
In our four-square, familiar pew

Was pattern to my youth—whose bark
Called me in summer dawns to rove—
Have you gone down into the dark
Where none is welcome, none may love?

I will not think those good brown eyes
Have spent their light of truth so soon;
But in some canine Paradise
Your wraith, I know, rebukes the moon,

And quarters every plain and hill,
Seeking its master . . . As for me,
This prayer at least the gods fulfil:
That when I pass the flood, and see

MY DOG

Old Charon by the Stygian coast

Take toll of all the shades who land,

Your little, faithful, barking ghost

May leap to lick my phantom hand.

THE LITTLE SINNER

“THIS blot,” you say, “upon my soul
Is far too dim for eye to see;
Matched with the many, I am whole;
Shall this be reckoned unto me?”

Yet when your death-freed spirit flies
Swift to some loved one found again,
Beware lest her illumined eyes
Grow strange, beholding that small stain.

FRAGMENT

WHAT time the moonbeam wakes the owl
I rode toward that hoary grange;
The wood was like a hangman's scowl;
The empty fields were dim and strange.

No drop of fear was in my blood,
Yet I turned cold to see that house,
And clutched my falchion when the wood
Loomed over me with shaggy brows.

And while within its beetling shade
I stood beside our trysting yew,
Did I not hear a voice that said:
"She is not true, she is not true"?

"She is not true," the branches wept,
"Her murderous brothers have you fast;
And here where blossom-white she slept
The moon shall bleach your bones at last."

FRAGMENT

Then as I strode forth, blind with hate,
And moaning like a man possessed;
Was yon a creaking postern-gate,
Or did one wind an arbalest?

And O, she came, star-eyed, moon-pale;
Like a white bird that drifts to home
Safe on the bosom of the gale
Far down the fleecy leagues of foam.

That night we rode through death-cold streams,
But with the day my tower was won;
And pain and fear were futile dreams
Melted in love's immortal sun.

MEMORIES

I N that last year before she died,
And I became a living ghost;
How often, sitting side by side
Near the dim copse that she loved most

Of all the woodland haunts grown dear
To me through her, to her with me,
I mocked at life that I might hear
Her sweet voice sing its eulogy.

I said: "The thrush, though meaning well,
Lacks tune; the murmur of the breeze
Drones mournful as a passing-bell
To modern ears grown hard to please.

"The view leaves something to desire;
How summer burns the naked land!
For me the winter, with its fire
Where you and I sit hand in hand."

MEMORIES

Poor foolish jests! the winter snow
Lies heavy on my heart and her.
O faded suns of long ago!
O thrush, departed chorister!

AFTERWARDS

WHEN the strange twilight of unearthly dawn
Broadens across my vision, and dispels
Death's momentary dusk, ah me! poor waif
Who made the great refusal, I shall glide
Trembling behind the band of happy souls,
Like a sad leper creeping far aloof
From some bright throng of princes. They will pass
Confident, one by one, the frowning doors
That guard eternal beauty, while I stand
Dismal in icy chaos. Yet at length
The dreadful warden, seeing my dim ghost,
Shall hail me, crying: "These I know; but thou
Comest here a guest unbidden, with no light
Of honour round about thee, and thy form
Is kin to them that drift in ceaseless wind;
Hast thou done aught to save thee?"

Then my soul
Shall answer: "Nay: I was the least of men:

AFTERWARDS

Ever the crucial instant found me slack;
Ever my fancy nursed a hundred aims;
Ever in vain life's trumpet call rang out
For me, most recreant. I was the toy
Of sickly dreams, and shrank from the fierce world,
Feeding my heart with images. This alone,
This grace was mine, that she, from whose deep eyes
The whole sad earth won beauty; she, the star
Of tenderness and pity; she, whom God
Tore from my rebel hands, disdained me not;
But knowing all my vanity and sloth,
My futile ardours and too swift despairs,
Loved me and deemed me worthy of love."

Ah! then

Surely the yielding angel shall unbar
The ward of that inexorable gate;
And I shall see her face, nor find it strange.

THE RETURN

*F*ROM Andover to Wantage town
Is nigh on forty mile:
You go all day on a grassy way
With not a stone nor stile,
And some companionable wind
Speaks to you all the while.

*You are so high above the world,
That, as the shepherd tells,
When the wind blows up from South and West
It brings the sharp sea-smells;
And elfin-dim when the North wind blows,
You hear the Oxford bells.*

*It is I that would hear the Oxford bells
Above the Oxford flowers,
When the chestnuts are a-droop with drouth,
Sounding the sleepy hours;*

THE RETURN

*Or quavering in the loud March gale
That thunders round her towers.*

*It is I that am fain to walk again
Where the smooth downs curve and rise;
Where the voices of men are deep and kind,
And the lads have faithful eyes;
And noble in its loneliness
The ancient Ridgeway lies.*

I

The corn is threshed, the leaves are brown,
The grass is grey and sere;
And keen athwart the chilly down
The wet wind numbs my ear;

The rooks are whirled about a sky
That gleams like polished lead;
And swift and high the wild duck fly
Across the watershed.

October flames in red and gold
Along the Whitehorse Vale.
Too soon, too soon the years grow old,
And burning dreams grow pale;

THE RETURN

Yet let me take the kindly road,
Trode once in every part
By feet that seemed a lighter load,
And bore a lighter heart.

O friends with whom I climbed the hill
From Avebury's ring of stone,
To-day your friend, for good or ill,
Follows the path alone.

II

The arguments, the jests and all!
O comrades, is it true
That every year is like a wall
Dividing me from you?

For seven golden springs have gone
Since one immortal day
'Twixt Hackpen Hill and Uffington,
Along the Icknield way.

What pledges, by the Kingston oaks
We gave, and deemed them truth!
But time, like silting sand, still chokes
The generous flood of youth;

THE RETURN

And like those Lambourn graves that house
The bones of heroes slain,
The Seven Barrows of our vows
Lie gloomy on the plain.

Nay, nay, I wrong the years and you!
From our old camping-ground
I see the dear familiar view,—
The gorge, the Dragon's mound;

The thin Horse gleams upon the cliff,
And Whitehorse hill is green,—
God ease a bitter heart!—as if
Those years had never been.

III

The sun is bright on Wooton Vale,
And bright on Cumnor Hurst;
And at Cumnor inn they keep good ale
For a lad to slake his thirst.

And there is a room that I used to know,
Where the errant sunbeam glints
On the pewter mugs that stand arow,
And the varnished sporting prints.

THE RETURN

I will climb to-day from Northmoor Weir,
And sit in the dusky room;
And drink a tankard of that beer
To the ghosts that haunt its gloom.

To the ghosts that triumphed, the ghosts that failed
I offer the silent toast;
Derelict wreck or ship full-sailed,
Each of them here a ghost.

And a health to him who sleeps below
Where no sun glides and glints;
Till tears play tricks with the pewter row
And the foolish sporting prints.

My ancient love has wings to fly
To earth's uncharted ends;
In whatsoever land you lie,
Hail and farewell, old friends.

IV

Where are the valiant and the gay
Who found the shy stream's source,
And tramped with me the ancient way
From Hackpen to the Horse?

THE RETURN

All sundered from that goodly band,
On graver quests they roam;
Aliens in every alien land,
And waifs on all strange foam.

But you, our chief, whom all men loved,
The world knows where you rest;
We have no fear that you have roved
On some new madcap quest.

Lucky we called you,—born to sweep
Through Fortune's bolts and bars;
And lucky to the end, you sleep
Beneath the Indian stars.

V

And you, the failure? You who sank
From dingy bad to worse;
Who saw the rough, straight road, and shrank;
O, London was your curse!

In London snares your feet have tripped;
And London's lips can tell
That better men than you have slipped
And fallen down to Hell.

THE RETURN

But though the virtuous hate your name,
And each day seem a plan
To keep you safe amid your shame,—
Take heart, and play the man.

Your fiery impulse broke their rules;
But you have life to mend.
O set your teeth against the fools,
And fight them to the end.

VI

I will go up on Cumnor height
Amid the early mist,
And watch the city change to white
Her spires of amethyst.

There, lying on a couch of turves,
My eager eyes shall roam
From Marston, where the Cherwell curves,
To Radcliffe's dew-bright dome.

The sheer light falls on roofs and towers,
The Christ Church belfry gleams;
And Magdalen, like a lily, flowers
Above her sundering streams.

THE RETURN

Far down the breeze that sinks and swells,
There comes once more the chime
Of leisurely, ancestral bells,
Worn thin and sweet with time.

O bells that echo in the street,
With mellow tongues that say:
"Come out, come out, you glad young feet,
To tread the golden way!"

One son you own who ne'er returns
To your most generous doors;
Who treads the lonely height, and learns
A darker lore than yours.

VII

Easy and beautiful the path
That leads to her below;
O short and beautiful the path,
But yet I will not go.

For in her streets at every turn,
And in each cloistered place,
My eyes would search, my heart would burn
For some remembered face.

THE RETURN

O Men who tread the ancient ways
About the lovely town,
Fair be your sojourn, long your days!
But my Men have gone down.

The elms are bare, the creepers die
In scarlet on the wall;
It is a place of ghosts, and I
Am ghostlier than all.

VIII

Mute is the hillside, mute the wood;
But o'er the wet brown brakes
The robin pipes, and in my blood
The wandering fever wakes.

The leaves are whirling down the slope;
Fade, fade, autumnal day!
Since like a leaf my youth and hope
Dwindle and whirl away.

Yet whether I shoulder a boy's gay load
Or the leaden pack of care,
Still at my feet my own true road
Lies beautiful and bare.

THE RETURN

Further afield than the Ridgeway goes;
Steeper than Hackpen height;
To an austere place that no man knows
It leads me day and night.

The fierce wind-fingers tug my sleeve;
I turn; but wheresoe'er
These errant feet shall range, I leave
Half of my heart with her.

Again, again, the long path gleams,
And lures me with its spell!
O Mother of my drowning dreams,
Farewell, a long farewell.

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